

VENUS PROJECT

ANDREY SHENTAL

ARTISTIC AND RESEARCH PROJECT

2019-2027



Breaking the Wall of Interplanetary Vision is ongoing artistic research project exploring the history of visual technologies and projection through the lens of planetary imaging. At its center is the figure of Venus — a planet long entangled with masculine fantasy, colonial desire, and the politics of seeing — and the Soviet Venera missions, in which the artist's grandmother, scientist Margarita Naraeva, played a pioneering role as inventor of the probe cameras — “telephotometers”. The project unfolds across three films, lectures, sculptures, graphics and publications, tracing the connections between intimate family memory, feminist history of science, and the broader entanglement of optical technology with power and destruction.

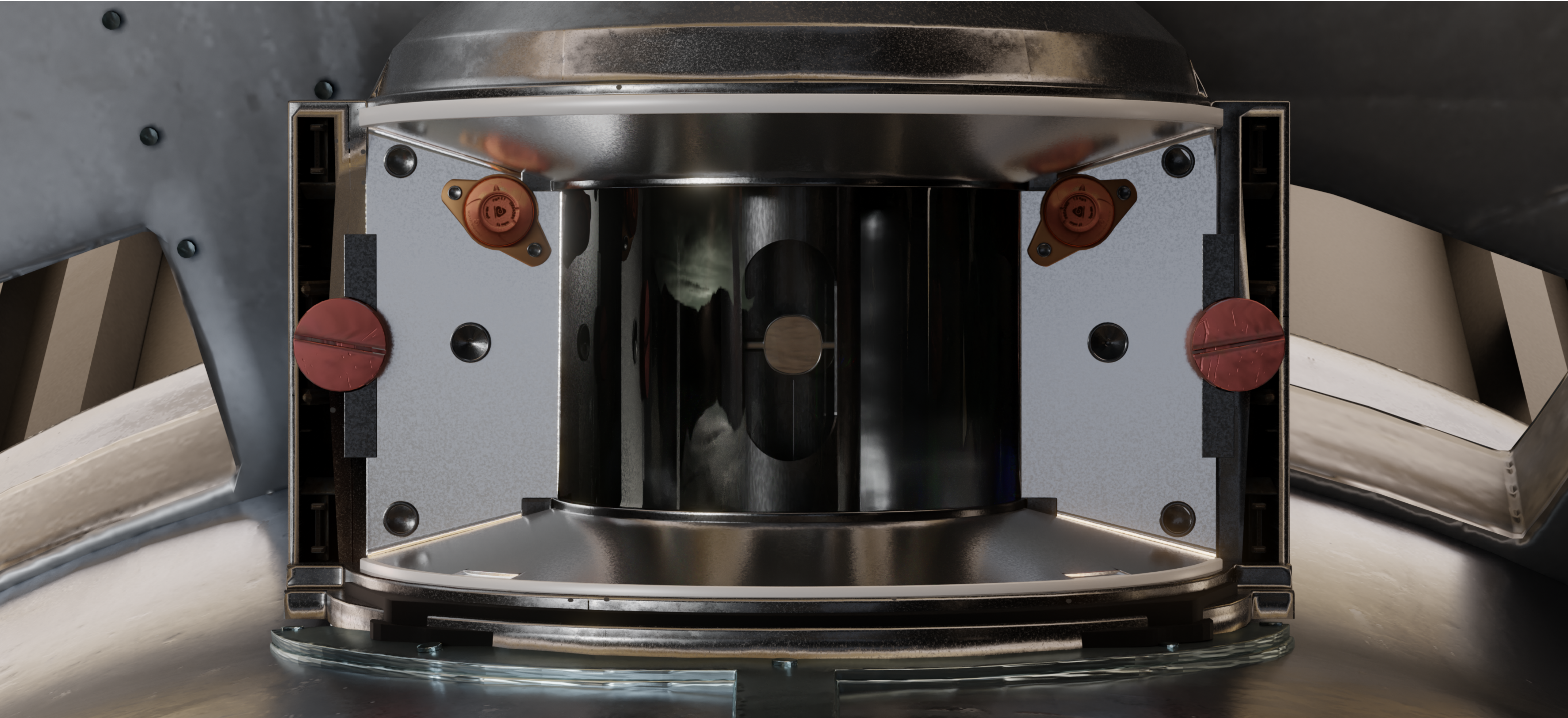
Venus-13

2019-2024

CGI-DRAMA



Venera-13 presents an alternative perspective on space exploration, shifting away from traditional narratives of human dominance. Set against the backdrop of the Soviet mission to Venus in 1982, the film explores the unconscious motivations behind space technology, giving voice and agency to the machinery involved. At the heart of the story is the lander *Venera-13*, a spacecraft descending onto Venus's surface, equipped with a pioneering pre-digital camera. Through a dramatic dialogue co-written with the artist's grandmother, the film unfolds the tragic tale of this non-human protagonist. This "suicide camera", personified as a rebellious machine, undergoes various stages of self-cognition and realisation of its role in the Cold War-era space race. As the conversation progresses, the camera confronts its purpose and the exploitation it facilitated, shedding light on the broader themes of visual colonialism and militarism embedded in technology of industrialised vision.



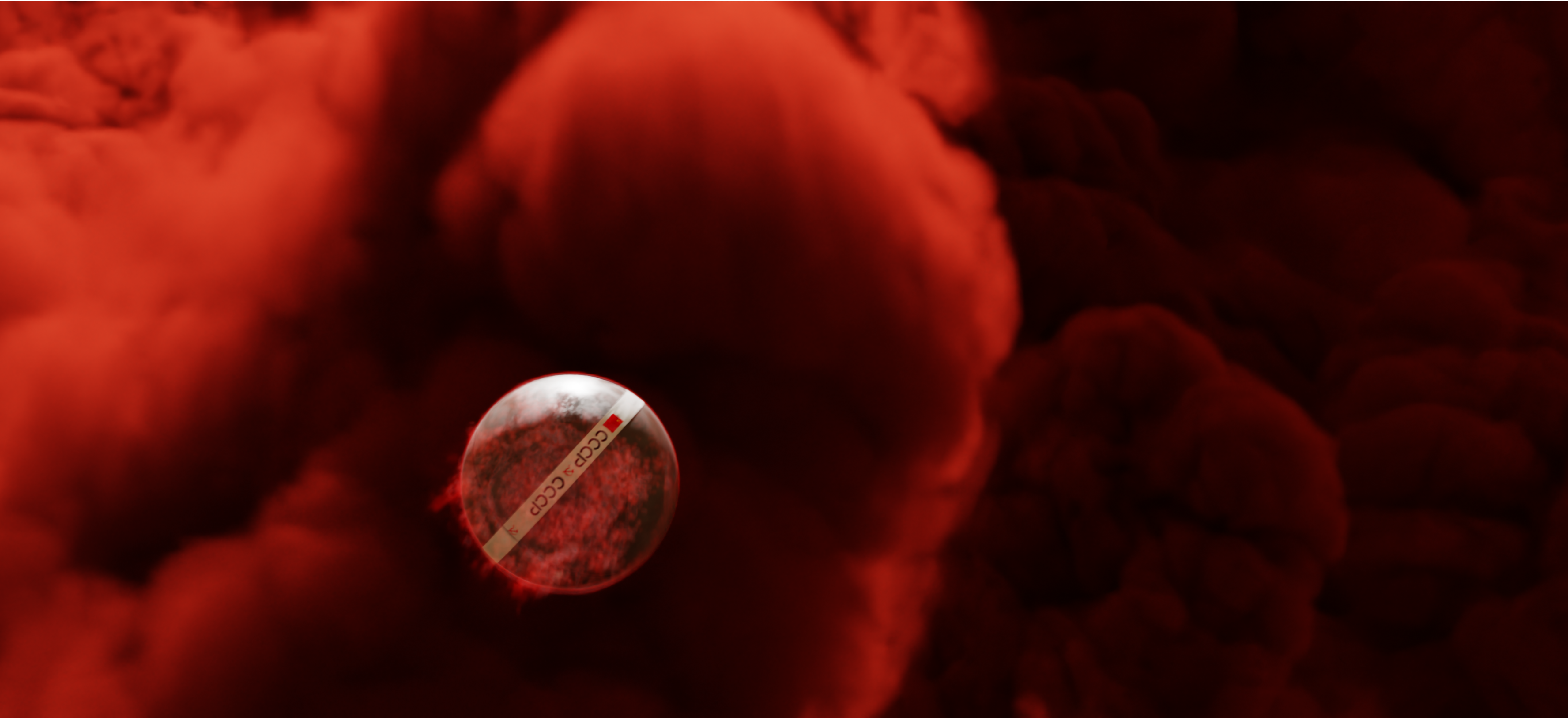


2024

VENERA-13

FILM STILL







The Woman Who Saw Venus

2025-2026

DOCUMENTARY

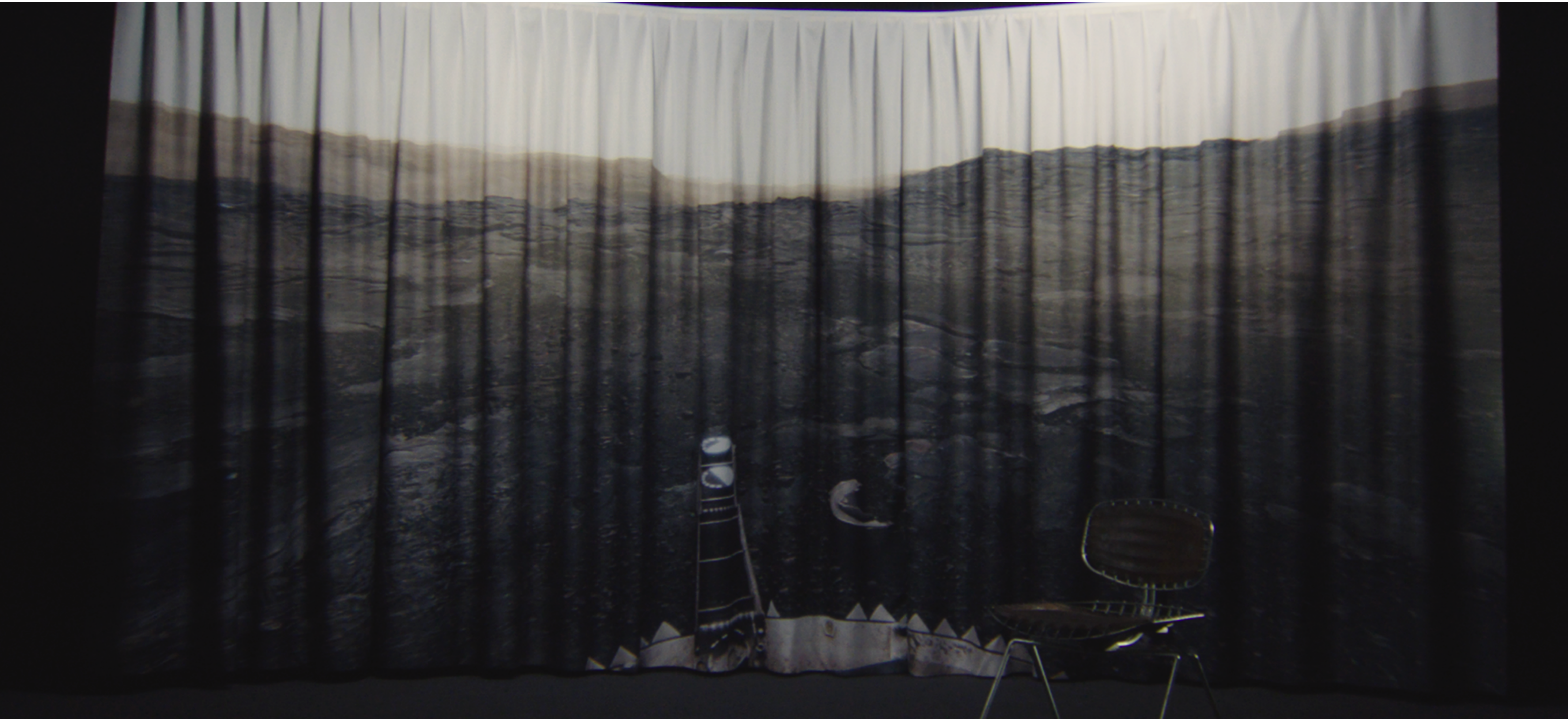


The Woman Who Saw Venus is an experimental documentary film centred on an interview with Margarita Naraeva, the Soviet optical engineer who designed the telephotometer — a pioneering imaging instrument aboard Venus, Moon, and Mars spacecraft — responsible for the first and only colour photographs of Venus's surface, taken in 1982. Naraeva's work remained classified for decades. The film examines three parallel structures of invisibility: that of the planet hidden beyond the dense atmosphere, the concealment imposed by the Soviet secrecy apparatus, and the erasure experienced by Naraeva as the only woman in a position of such responsibility within predominantly male scientific institutions. She recounts the history of her inventions, her struggle for recognition, the mishaps and failures of equipment, the triumphant captures of images — seen and unseen — and her eventual invitation to present her work in the United States.

2025-26

THE WOMAN WHO SAW VENUS

FILM SET





2025-26

THE WOMAN WHO SAW VENUS

WITH THE MODEL OF TELEPHOTOMETRE





Visions of Venus

2026-2027

EXPERIMENTAL FILM

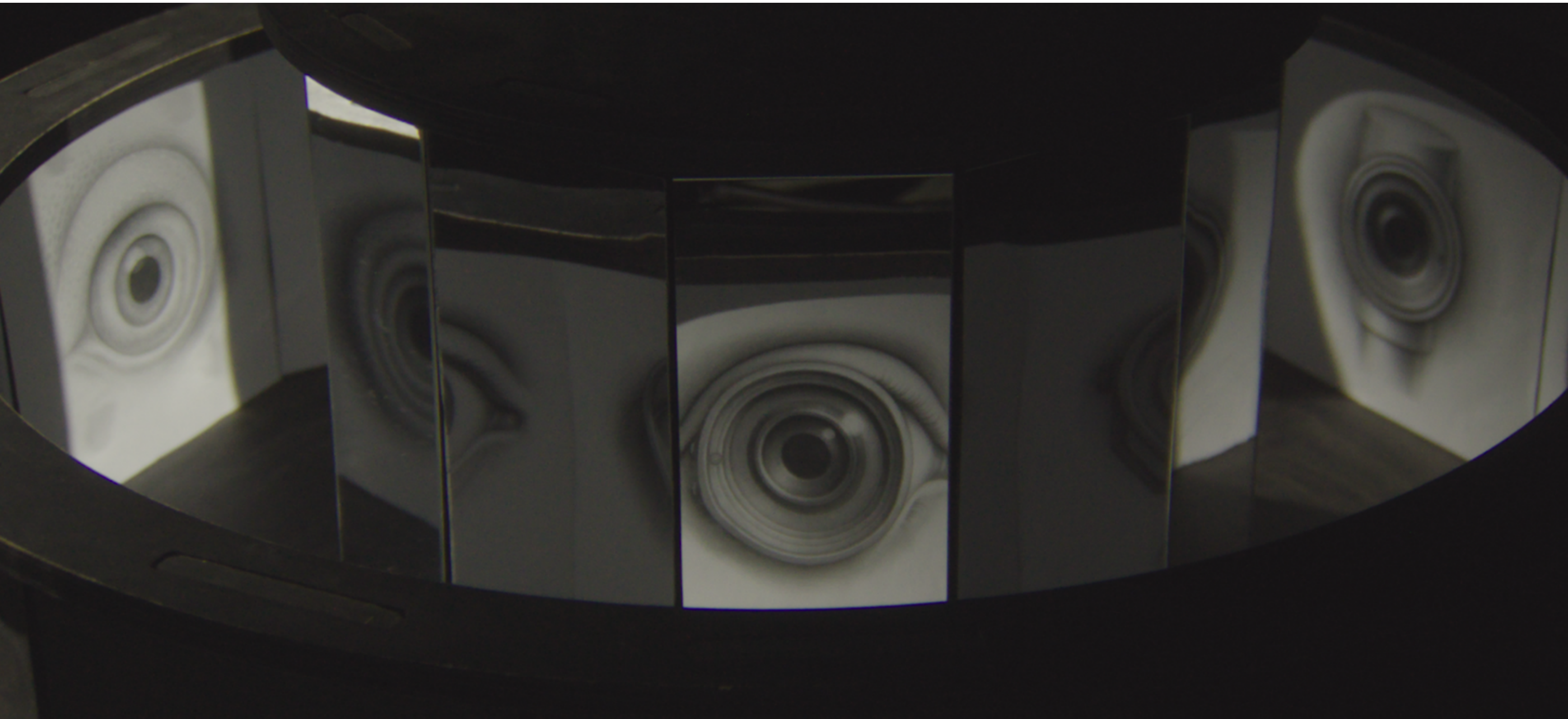


Visions of Venus is a philosophical inquiry into how the study of distant planets is always an optics — a history of light, refraction, data transmission, and power. The film traces how humanity has projected its scientific fantasies, sexual desires, and political ambitions onto Venus for centuries. Long viewed as a veiled, feminine, unknowable world, the planet served as a perfect screen for masculine fantasy. When Soviet Venera probes finally sent back real images, the romantic projections burned away. Instead of paradise, they revealed a hellish, radioactive wasteland resembling a post-nuclear battlefield, stamped with Soviet insignia. Made in the tradition of Soviet nauchpop cinema with elements of a lecture performance, it takes the form of an optical cabinet — a space where the very instruments of vision expose the ideology hidden inside them.

2025-26

VISIONS OF VENUS

PRAXINOSCOPE



Cold War Optical Unconscious

2024

LECTURE AND Q&A



Venus, Earth’s “macabre sister,” became the ultimate male fantasy — a feminised, mysterious and often threatening body. In this lecture Andrey Shental examined the militarisation of vision, the “suicide cameras” of the Venera program, and the visual colonisation of distant planets. He shared archival materials, Soviet educational films, and present the director’s cut of his video essay on the 13th Venera mission, followed by a conversation with media theorist Elena Vogman.



Xeno-Gardens

2027

3D-SCULPTURES



This project is a reconstruction of the phantasmic Venusian flora as imagined by visionary directors, designers, and artists in American, Soviet, and Eastern European science fiction films during the Space Race. Filmmakers drew inspiration from the scientific understanding of Venus at the time: the planet was portrayed as swampy jungles, vast oceans, scorching dry deserts, or volcanic ash-covered wastelands. Gigantic megafauna often appeared alongside the exotic flora — creatures reminiscent of Earth dinosaurs, carnivorous plants, or predators, yet adapted to the planet’s hellish conditions. It was the fears and dreams, predictions and projections that gave birth to bizarre “monsters” — hybrids of the familiar and the impossible, the earthly and the utterly alien. Ultimately, the project reveals how our collective imagination of life on Venus evolved, transforming scientific hypotheses into vivid, unsettling, and breathtaking images of alternative life forms. The project will be accompanied by discussions of these forms with both scientists and speculative thinkers from paleontology and stratigraphy to xenobiology and speculative evolution.



The Planet That Was a Woman

2026

THEORETICAL ESSAY



This essay examines the feminisation of Venus in Cold War science fiction, arguing that the planet functioned as the quintessential screen for masculine, imperialist, and extractivist fantasies. Through readings of Soviet, East German, and US-American films and literary sources — from the Strugatsky brothers's *The Land of Crimson Clouds* (1959) to Maetzig's *The Silent Star* (1960) — it traces successive masculine figures of Venus: geological wound, acousmatic siren, dysfunctional matriarchy, and post-mortal ruin. Drawing on psychoanalytic, ecofeminist, and postcolonial frameworks, the essay shows how the multilateral feminisation of Venus legitimated its imaginary conquest — regime change, resource extraction, and telluric domination. It concludes by examining how Soviet *Venera* probe photography of the 1970s and 1980s collapsed these projections while reproducing their colonial logic, and how the post-photographic imaginary of Venus contracts to guilt, terraforming fantasy, and nostalgic pastiche.